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The Impact of Absent Fathers on Single Mothers

In the United States the definition of a family takes many forms other than the traditional married couple with children. Many families are divided due to divorce and separation. This often leaves a single parent, usually the mother, to raise the children. The father plays a major role in providing for the family whether he lives in the same household or not, and his participation, or lack thereof, directly relates to the single mother’s journey in raising their children.

When a mother is left to raise her child alone the financial responsibilities are immense. Lynn Olcott stated in her essay *The Ballad of a Single Mother* the trials and tribulations that come along with being a single mother. She uses a personal occurrence explaining how a minister aided her perception of the hardships of being a single mom by telling her “Nowadays, bread, winner, bread maker, it’s all the same thing.”(Olcott 446) This leads to a heavier burden on the mother by playing both parental figure roles. Olcott follows this by saying money was always the main issue in raising her child due to gender inequalities in the workplace and being a one-income family. This then snowballed to bigger struggles like having to work made her have to put her son in daycare, which then cost more money, which then still left her in financial stress. (446) Rebecca M. Blank follows along this same topic in her publication *Absent Fathers: Why Don’t We Ever talk About the Unmarried Men?* by pronouncing the “lack of parental support” from absent fathers “is a major factor contributing to the poverty of single mothers and their children.” (440, Summary) They both agree that if the father was in the household or offered some sort of contribution such as child support it would make it easier on the family to strive and not be troubled. Being a single mother, Olcott stated she always could provide the necessities for her child but any extra luxuries were hard to come by. At one point she had lost her job and took one where she took a salary cut. Her son played soccer and she couldn’t come up with the dues, but luckily had people in her community to lend a hand. (Olcott 447) She once again further shows the adversity the absence of a father places not only on the mother but the child.

Economically, absent father seem to fly under the radar. Blank explains that it’s hard to make the father accountable because there is little data collected on absent fathers. The information gathered by the government is based on families who live under the same household, which leaves out a huge variable making it harder to study (Blank 440). She states that one could assume that most poor, uneducated, and unattached men hold a big percentage of the absent father population. The way the economy has evolved creates continuing problems of finding a job. (441 par. 7) Without a job it is harder for an absent father to be accountable, which then leaves the mother out to dry. Olcott goes along with this by blaming society and the economy declaring they don’t help but add difficulty for single mothers raising a child without a father figure. She says “society routinely underpays women” and “undervalues child care”. Society is not against absent fathers and not for single mothers, making women such as her “invisible”. (Olcott 447) Blank adds to this by showing how the result of monetary and societal restrictions directly correlate to impact of fathers not being in their child’s lives and only bad can come from it. They both concur that it will continue to be hard on single mothers until society holds more accountability for their actions or non action.

The absence of the father is not only hard financially but also emotionally. Olcott reflects back when her son was young. Since she was the sole provider she missed out on crucial milestones that a mother should experience with her child like the first time he stood up in his crib and when he was potty trained. (Olcott 446) She implies these were sentimental moments she could not get back due to picking up the father’s slack. Blank goes further with this by saying “decline in marriage and the decreased support for children by their fathers are both intimately linked to economic changes of the last two decades” (443 par. 20). From this, they both are in affirmation that this connection in itself helped cause the economic transformation and can be seen as a negative aspect of fathers who do not help raise their children. If there is some sort of reform that makes fathers actually provide substantial assistance in the form of child support it would not only help the poverty line but also assist women who are working on all heights of income. (443 par. 18)

While Olcott and Blank mainly focused on the father’s role of absence in the family, it is also to note that there are single fathers as well. The well-known show Full House portrays this type of family with patriarch Danny Tanner, three daughters, best friend and brother-in-law. This is different than the conventional divorced single family because the mother figure died. In this case, there is no possibility of financial support from the other spouse. He is in a constant battle trying to figure out how to raise and support his girls without a motherly figure with the help of his brother-in-law Jesse and best friend Joey. Even though this outcome was due to unexpected circumstances he had a choice to raise them and did. His disposition is definitely considered in the minority compared to what Olcott experienced and Blank portrayed. Just like Olcott showed how hard it is to be a single parent as a woman, Full House shows that struggle as a single parent is not set just to one gender. It also relates to Olcott’s essay because they both are trying to raise children that are a different sex than themselves. In many episodes of Full House this is present when the older daughters Stephanie and DJ go through the middle school and high school years where boys and puberty all rush in at once. This is a time when a girl needs her mother and where certain aspects in their lives a father can’t help with or understand properly to help them convert into women. This could be implied with Olcott since she had a son.

As Olcott and Blank have made known, having a present father figure or one who contributes helps the family as a whole. His role lessens the financial and emotional burden placed on the family and society. Without a father figure the passage for a mother to raise a child has more likelihood to cause unneeded stress which will hamper success.

Works Cited

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092359/